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The challenge of Europe, dangerous analogies.

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“Analogy: a comparison between things essentially or generically different, but strikingly alike in one or more pertinent aspects”

Webster's New Dictionary

“Are you blind, don't you see that the European Union will end up the same way Tito's Yugoslavia ended?” As a rule the people who ask this question are middle class, middle age, intelligent and traumatized ex-Yugoslavs living in the European Union. These doomsayers are not prophesying blood wars Balkan style, nor they hate the European Union, but they are captured by disturbing analogies. In sleepless nights their traumatized minds have produced a long list of troubling similarities between the factors, sentiments and actors that led to the collapse of Yugoslavia and some of the trends they see in the EU today. Their list of dangerous analogies has different versions but the essential parts are always the same. Tito's Yugoslavia was torn apart by a lack of solidarity. The rich republics- Slovenia and Croatia- were not interested any more to pay for the development of Kosovo or Macedonia. The EU today is also threatened by the deficit of solidarity. The richer states and regions in the EU are less and less willing to share with the poorer and old European member states are becoming hostile and suspicious to the newcomers. Yugoslavia collapsed because its political and intellectual elites underestimated the power of national sentiments and managed falsely to convince themselves that ethnic nationalism is something from the past. The EU elites are making the same mistake.

They like to talk about European identity and multiculturalism when Europe today faces the rise of nationalism and xenophobia. The fear of the immigrants brought to power several governments in Europe, who openly preach intolerance and live in “us versus them” world. The list makers are eager to point out that the current EU like Tito's Yugoslavia has lost its narrative and that now when the generation of the founding father has passed away the new generations have forgotten what the EU was about. The debate about EU in many member states is focused much more on what they are losing in the Union than on what they gain out of it. Exactly like in Yugoslavia in 1980s. The federal center/Brussels today, Belgrade then/ has become the enemy of choice for the opportunistic national politicians. The referenda in France and Netherlands made list makers convinced in the validity of their fears. People who are eager to ask the “are you blind” question do not believe that prosperity or democracy is enough to keep the Union together. Prosperity will probably end some day and in their troubled memories the process of democratization gave power to the people and the result was that people destroyed the country they lived in. What followed after the popular vote was the popular fight.

It is not surprising that those shaped by traumatic experience tend to be extreme in their opinions and their fears. What makes survivors of Yugoslavia's collapse so different from the ordinary EU citizen is his newly found knowledge of fragility of things with which we live? “Everything was forever, until it was no more” can be the title of the collective memoir of a generation. The citizens and the elites in the EU new member states know this strange feeling when you witness when something that looks stable and unchangeable collapse over night.

In reality analogies between the European Union and Tito's Yugoslavia are striking but also misleading. Tito's Yugoslavia at the end of the day was a communist dictatorship and its collapse was rooted in the nature of its political regime. It is not by accident that none of the communist federations/Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia/ have survived. The League of the Yugoslav Communists, Yugoslav army and Josip Bros Tito were probably the only truly Yugoslav things about Yugoslavia. So, to compare Tito's “pragmatic dictatorship” with the democratic EU is a false starting point. Yugoslavia was an economic failure and the EU is an economic success. Yugoslavia was at best a mid-size country at the periphery of Europe; the EU is a project of continental scale. Democracy deficit and not simply “democratic deficit” was the defining element of Tito's project. Tito's Yugoslavia was a charismatic regime that failed to find a new model of existence after the death of its founder. After Marshall Tito's death the country was in a state of permanent crisis.

It all is true, but to maintain that Yugoslavia was doomed to die from its earliest days or that there was no chance for democratic Yugoslavia makes no more sense than to posit that its creation was inevitable, in fashion

of post-war Titoist historiography. Tito's Yugoslavia collapsed not because it was metaphysically doomed but because there were not enough political actors who were pro-Yugoslav and pro-democratic at the same time. Yugoslavia failed because its leaders failed to re-perceive the world in which they live and to re-imagine how a post-Tito Yugoslavia can look like. Taking Yugoslavia for granted turned to be the most tragic mistake of those who preyed for its survival.

So, when some traumatized ex-Yugoslavs consciously or unconsciously compare their present experience in the EU with their experience in the now dead Tito's federation they have a point that some of us tend to miss. The point is that the European Union should not be taken for granted and that some of the external factors that contributed to the disintegration of Yugoslavia will play role in shaping European Union's fate in the next decade. In the way Yugoslavia was profoundly destabilized by the end of the Cold war and in the way Yugoslavia was de-legitimized by the sudden death of socialism, in this same way the EU will be shattered by the collapse post-Cold war world and by the crisis of liberalism and the shift in ideological fashion in the world.

"The EU was never enthusiastic about geopolitics but it has a lot to gain from the world of geoeconomics"

The New "Old World"

The statement that the end of Cold War status quo was one of the major factors contributing to the dissolution of Yugoslavia is an ultimate triviality. It is also true. The first Yugoslavia/the one created in 1918/ was invented by the Great Powers, but the second

Tito's Yugoslavia was sustained by the super-powers of the Cold war. The shortest explanation why it was unthinkable that Yugoslavia was going to collapse in 1970s was that the Soviet Union and the United States were not going to allow this to happen. Tito's "national way of communism" was useful for both Moscow and Washington. And this allowed Tito to get the loans of the imperialists and to be one of the leaders of the struggle against imperialism at the same time. Tito's Yugoslavia was the main critic and the main beneficiary of the Cold War status quo. It was in Belgrade in 1961 that the Non-Aligned Movement was founded and it was Tito who declared "we have no wish to depend on anyone. We do not want to be small change; we do not want to be involved in any policy of spheres of influence". Now it is easy to forget how popular Tito's Yugoslavia was in the days of the confrontation between the super-powers. But when the Cold war was over Yugoslavia felt victim to its geopolitical irrelevance.

Is "irrelevance" a legitimate concern for the EU? In the last year European economy has become the biggest

single economy in the world thus contradicting those who just some years ago were ready to view European economic model as inefficient and without future. The euro is on its way to turn into world currency. European companies that were often criticized in the 1990s for their lack of dynamism perform in the moment much better than their American counterparts. The claims that the European welfare state hurts economy turned to be a myth. In short Europe is doing well and what is not less important the EU is appreciated by the rest of the world. According to the polls the EU is the world's most admired world power. So, why EU should be worried about the shifts in the geopolitical context? Is the EU not set to be the biggest beneficiary of the coming geopolitical shift?

In reality the EU has reasons to worry. The European Union was one of the major beneficiaries of the post-cold war world order that was dominated by the United States. Despite of the fact that in recent years Europe was one of the sharpest critics of America's unipolar world in reality America's world was quite hospitable to the European project. It was due to the America's global hegemony that the EU has emerged on the world stage as free riding super power. America's global hegemony allowed EU to be a super power without the need to be nation-state type of actor. It was Washington's global hegemony that allowed the EU to enlarge itself and to concentrate on its internal institutional architecture. America's security umbrella allowed EU to become global power without the need to become real military power. America's global hegemony that turned the world in competition between companies and not competition between states perfectly fitted European interest. The EU was never enthusiastic about geopolitics but it has a lot to gain from the world of geoeconomics.

It seems now that all this is going to change. American hegemony is over and Europe is going to face new and less hospitable world. "The world has become normal again. Struggle for status and influence in the world have returned as central features of the international scenes". It turned out that there are two exist from the 20th century-one is towards EU like 21 century, the other is back to the 19th century. In the new post-American world the world stage will be dominated most probably by 19 century minded traditional powers that fundamentally differ in their assumption from the Brussels consensus. It was Kishore Mahbubani the best known prophet of the Asian century who made the verdict that "Europe cannot continue to be a giant Switzerland. The Swiss can feel secure because they are surrounded by Europe." Europe is not surrounded by Europe. While EU citizens live in a bubble of security but each day they feel a rising psychological insecurity about their future. According to the opinion polls like Americans and unlike Chinese or Indians, the majority of Europe fears the future. European publics' fear of the future is the best manifestation of the general mood of uncertainty when it comes to EU's relevance on the global stage.

The paradox about the EU's position in the world is that it is both a giant and a dwarf. The EU being a post-modern political formation can only lose from a world where the rivalry between great powers will determine the global agenda. The EU will either be forced to develop a single state qualities, by introducing European army and external service or the tensions between the member states will rise. At present the EU has a surplus of popularity but a deficit of power. But the sentiments of European publics make the prospect for more federalist Europe highly unlikely. Since its enlargement up to 27 member states the EU is not realistically viewed any more as a federalist state in making. Federalist rhetoric is still alive in certain corners of Europe but the federalist dream is given away. The challenge for the EU is how to be powerful and relevant in a 19th century minded world in its present constitutional form. Will the "return of the 19th century" will not lead to the re-nationalization of the foreign policies of the big member states and are these states big enough to claim any global role. In short, the decline of American power and the collapse of American hegemony/nevertheless how you feel about it/ is more a risk than an opportunity for the European project.

The shift in ideological fashions

The change of the geopolitical status quo is not the only change that can threaten the European project. In reality, the change of the geopolitical context is accompanied by a major ideological shift that will affect EU and its relations with the rest of the world. Here the comparisons with Yugoslavia can be instructive. Tito's Yugoslavia for almost three decades functioned in the world of ideas as an embodiment of the fashionable theory of the convergence between communism and capitalism. Tito's empire serves as the model for the reform minded communists in the Eastern block and as a hope for détente minded anti-communists in the Western block. But Tito's version of the Third way lost its attractiveness in the wake of 1989. Overnight Yugoslavia went out of fashion. The velvet revolution of 1989 and their anti-communist message made irrelevant Yugoslav attempt to represent a humanized version of state socialism, one based on self-management and solidarity with the Third World. The citizens and political elites of Yugoslavia lost the belief that they are on the progressive side of history and that the world moves in their direction. Yugoslav elites turned to other ideas in their search for inspiration.

The EU can be hardly hit by the change of ideological fashions. For the last decade the European public opinion assumed that globalization is synonymous with the decline of the nation state and nationalism as a political force. The EU was tempted to read its own experience of overcoming of ethnic nationalism and political religions as a universal trend. The end of history was American slogan but European reality in the 1990s. As Mark

Leonard has put it in his book "Why Europe will run 21 century" "Europe represents a synthesis of the energy and freedom that come from liberalism with the stability and welfare that come from social democracy. As the world becomes richer and moves beyond satisfying basic needs such as hunger and health, the European way of life will become irresistible". But what till yesterday looked universal in European experience today starts to look exceptional. It is enough to look at China, India, and Russia in order to see that both ethnic nationalism and religion are back in shaping global politics. Post-modern post-nationalism and secularism are making Europe different than the rest of the world. Nationalism and religion are back as major ideological driving forces. The world is becoming more capitalist but this does not necessarily mean more democratic. China and Russia start to be viewed as alternative to the model of democratic capitalism. It is not difficult to predict that in the next ideological cycle liberalism will be in retreat. The rise of ethnic nationalism and the return of religion are not only more and more present in the non-European world; they are also more present within Europe itself. Brussels as a capital of the EU is very different in its spirit than Brussels as a capital of Belgium. EU's Brussels is in love of diversity and multiculturalism while Belgium's Brussels is witnessing the rise of symbolic politics and the ghost of the ethnically driven partition.

In short, European project can be in danger as a result of misreading its own history. The current European Union is at one and the same time the outcome of the defeat and the success of ethnic nationalism. It is enough to re-read Tony Judt superb history of Europe, not accidentally called Post-War in order to recognize that it was the destructions and trauma of the WWII that learn European publics to hate nationalism but it was the "ethnic cleansing" in its version of "ethnic transfers" that followed the War that made European states homogeneous enough for tolerating diversity.

Most people brought up in Western Europe during the Cold war have imbibed consciously or unconsciously a Whig interpretation of European history. European history since 1945 has been told to them as a story of progress towards more prosperity, more freedom and more federal EU. The East Europeans were more than happy to buy this version of history. But the new geopolitical and ideological reality that EU can face in the next decade will make all these assumptions problematic. What the dangerous analogies between the EU and Tito's Yugoslavia demonstrates is that there two major risks that the EU faces at the present moment of its history. The one risk is to take the EU for granted and be unable to see the change when it comes. The second risk is to be paralyzed the shock of the change and to lose trust in your own model. Tito's Yugoslavia happened to fail in both of these tests. We should hope that the EU will do much better.